THE LATE CONFLAGRATIONS IN EUROPE AND AMERICA.

BY J. L——Y.

"Thoughts must be—thought."

However absorbed—nay dissolved men of the present age may be in matters of *immediate* and momentary import; still, the Royal Exchange, the Houses of Parliament and the Tower—Hamburg in fine, and Pittsburg, must startle the most placid and languid mind; events, to which the latest awful loss of life in Dover-street (and one year previous in Oxford-street), form not less pitiful appendages. If such (material) losses of property, were to be considered merely in their *material* bearings—which, however, is always wrong—we might say, *fifty millions* sterling have, in these instances, been burnt, and if, say, a gold mine, or gold mines might have been discovered contemporaneously with these events—well, then the losses would have been *repaid*, restituted. But such is *not* the case. Such conflagrations entail not merely material, but *moral* and *social* evils of the greatest import—and it is the duty of the "science of public architecture" (*Staat's - Architektur*), as well as other branches of public good, to consider these events attentively, and to devise, if possible, means against their recurrence. Amongst the moral and social evils, concomitant of such awful catastrophes, are to be reckoned—the loss of careful and loving parents and guardians, the interruption of education and domestic habits of a number of children—in fine, *all* the numberless evils following a more or less protracted existence of poverty, discomfort, disorder. Alluding hereby chiefly to the case of Hamburg and Pittsburg (at which latter place alone *forty millions* of dollars of property were consumed)—we may be told, that these cases are so *distant*, either in time or space, that they hardly deserve attention. How much, however, would that man have deserved, who would have written thus—at Pittsburg, *before* it was burnt! God forbid, that we should wish to portend any such catastrophe to any place in these realms, or elsewhere. "*As long, however, as the same causes exist, equal effects may be anticipated, or at least apprehended.*"

To speak boldly and unflinchingly—the main cause of all these (*material*) catastrophes, is the material tendency and belief of the age. We grasp at nothing but immediate, momentary enjoyment; and, therefore, it *is* so as we wish it to be—immediate *but* momentary; without any sure and safe basis, save its insecurity. As *archi*-tecture, however, is an important radius of this, or any other social and civilized condition—it is in its restoration, *regeneration*, that a more stable, soundér, securer state of society is also to be sought for. Let those who *study* (!) architecture, look at the work of Antonio Bosio—*Roma sotterranea*. Why, they will see that the *great sewer* called *Cloaca maxima* has been built by those sinewy ancient Romans with a greater degree of strength and solidity, than we moderns give (aye, and ever can give) to our royal palaces. Such really are (to approach near Pittsburg and Hamburg) the *Doganas* and *Alfandegas* of Genoa, Venice, Lisbon, &c. But we moderns take a *slate*, and calculate thereon our seven per cent., or nine and a half per cent., as the thing most essential. And then we call for some cobbler or botcher—because *the* architect builds for ages, and not days—and on he goes, to glue and patch together some structure of gingerbread and pasteboard, as it were. Such are these warehouses, which have been, of late, subject to *periodical* conflagrations at Liverpool, etc. In fact, after the lady of a member of the legislature has been burnt in one of the best hotels of the metropolis—we are sorry to confess, that hardly any one is secure from similar accidents; and we call again upon those who have seen Italy, nay even Germany, to say, whether such could happen in any of the *locandas* or hotels of Rome, Naples, or even Frankfort. After such conflagrations here, the houses present, almost generally, a gutted appearance, and even the staircase (made by *contract* of the most futile deal boards) has completely disappeared. Out of such structures, *some one* may get out his 7½ per cent.; but those be-widowed and be-orphaned persons who have remained behind, have no bank to draw upon for any reasonable sort of palliation or consolation.

It is, consequently, the sacred duty of any architectural journal, which understands its *high* vocation, to strongly (albeit charitably and conciliatorily) protest against such a state of affairs, and to devise means how we *moderns*, without losing any of the advantages of modern civilization, can revert (retrograde?) to that solidity, and beauty, and sterlingness, which bursts on our eyes whenever we behold the structures of antiquity, be they even of the most common or subordinate use.

THE PRACTICAL STUDY OF GOTHIC ARCHITECTURE.

The popular author of Coningsby, in a novel* lately published, has said, "The monks were great architects:—not the faintest idea is generally prevalent of the appearance of England before and since the dissolution;—in England and Wales alone there were of these institutions, of different sizes—I mean monasteries, and chantries, and chapels, and great hospitals—considerably upwards of three thousand, all of them fair buildings, many of them of exquisite beauty." Our own opinion is, that the number of churches and buildings, judging even by the remains alone, is here *considerably* underrated. Standing on an eminence in any part of England, or with the map of any county before us, we can mark out a very great number of churches, all of them containing matter to interest and instruct, whilst the larger portion exemplify the best characteristics of Gothic architecture. The almost exclusive attention which, from their elaborate decoration and extent, the cathedrals and larger churches have absorbed, has prevented our paying to the humbler structure of the village, that due consideration so essentially requisite to a correct estimate of the value of the style. We hesitate not to say, that our wonder is more excited, and our admiration of the zeal of the old architects more commanded by the village churches of England than by the cathedrals—until within the last few years the only objects of investigation. That cathedrals and colleges, monasteries and hospitals should rise in all the richness which wealth, and the resources of the art could command, was rather a thing to be expected, from the influence which each body of clergy possessed over a large circle of surrounding country. Thus no design was deemed too vast to be carried into execution: stone and timber acquired without expense, contributions from the dying, command of vast revenues, and the exertion at all times of every engine, which a powerful priesthood could so well call into play, added to the constructive skill of the freemasons, led to the completion of projects, the mere mention of which now would be heard with astonishment or ridicule. Confident that others would finish what had been so sumptuously commenced, the medieval architects on the continent conceived projects of such immensity, that the reformation and the change of taste occurred ere the work had arrived at a conclusion. But that every village should possess a church, in whose features we recognize the same ardour in matters relating to religious worship, with corresponding scientific skill and elegance of design, only modified, and that most admirably, by the smaller resources and wants of the community—that in every obscure hamlet was the same spirit which animated the builders of cathedrals such as York and Salisbury,—is matter for admiration and amazement!

In a former number of this journal,† we endeavoured to urge the importance of a more careful examination of ancient models than architects are generally in the habit of devoting. Such an extended examination as we advocate would occupy more than a few months, but would probably afford an exact comprehension of the principles which guided the master architects of the middle ages, finally resulting in the practice of a style, not at enmity with the true principles of pointed architecture, yet, at the same time, unmarked by that tame, fac-simile imitation, which is the staple of modern professors, which is acquiesced in by them, and is too much fostered at our universities. To copy a window from this cathedral, and a buttress from that church is not the straight road to architectural excellence, nor the best means of supporting the dignity of the professor, and advancing the progress of the art:—the proper value of ancient models is not shewn in imitating them after the Chinese manner, but is rather—in combinations and suggestions from many examples,—to produce works truly original, in conveying no suggestion of their origin, or of the course by which they were arrived at. And here we cannot quote from the "Discourses" of Sir Joshua Reynolds without expressing a wish, that architects would apply the principles, which he endeavoured to inculcate, and which are as much applicable to their art as to the kindred one of painting. After speaking of the advantages to be derived from works of art, he says, "From the remains of the works of the ancients the modern arts were revived, and it is by their means that they must be restored a second time. The fire of the artist's own genius, operating upon those materials which have been thus diligently collected, will enable him to make new combinations, perhaps superior to what had ever before been in the possession of the art; as, in the mixture of the variety of metals, which are said to have been melted and run together at the burning of Corinth, a new, and till then unknown metal was produced, equal in value to any of those that had contributed to its composition.†

The stay-at-home architects, who study from "the Glossary," and design with Britton's and Pugin's works upon the table, have entirely mistaken the character of Gothic architecture. They have fostered an opinion, not yet done away with, that the style is necessarily an expensive one, while they have begotten a manner, unlike any preceding, and inconsistent with all correct notions of propriety. The same pinnacles from Beverley minster or Salisbury cathedral—the same door from King's College chapel—all which they had never seen except in engravings—they have repeated again and again in church and meeting house, even in cases where funds would barely suffice for the most ordinary objects. Had these "gentlemen of England" studied the true character of pointed architecture, where it only can be learnt, from the building itself, they would have discovered that every variety of ecclesiastical structure had a peculiar purpose, and was erected in a peculiar manner. They could not have failed to learn, that it was proper to impress a character upon each in accordance with its purpose, its situation, the component materials, the general amount of decoration, and the total cost. The parapets and pinnacles, which may be excellent in the cathedral, might be quite out of place in the village church, and the very mouldings may be required of different design. In the latter structure, except in the case of a small oratory or chapel, we seldom find much ornamental carving, but the building always seems to have been designed for the locality, and not, like many of our modern Gothic churches, as though transported from some other place. It is a key to the history of the neighbourhood, and of the people who there dwelt; and whilst the oratory was enriched in a degree becoming the wealth and lineage of the lord of the manor, the nave was unadorned, and accordant with the condition of the tillers of the soil. To erect a town church in the country, and a village church in a crowded thoroughfare, is often destructive of the *genius loci*, and convictive of an entire ignorance of the unerring rules of art. Plan and elevation, perspective outline, and the proportion of parts, details of battlement, base-mould or string course, all should receive the greatest degree of attention from the architect. The education required involves a larger outlay of time than most architects are prepared to devote thereto; and thus, "content to dwell in decencies for ever," many exhaust their single idea in every church they have to execute, whatever be its situation and other circumstances of the case. A painter does

* Sybil, or the Two Nations.

† Vide page 217 *ante*, art. "Ancient Models."

† In another place we find the following:—"I cannot help imagining that I see a promising young painter equally vigilant, whether at home or abroad, in the streets or in the fields. Every object that presents itself is to him a lesson. He regards all nature with a view to his profession, and combines her beauties, or corrects her defects. He examines the countenance of man under the influence of passion, and often catches the most pleasing hints from subjects of turbulence or deformity. Even bad pictures themselves supply him with useful documents; and, as Leonardo da Vinci has observed, he improves upon the fanciful images that are sometimes seen in the fire, or are accidentally sketched upon a discoloured wall.

The artist who has his mind thus filled with ideas, and his hand made expert by practice, works with ease and readiness."—*Reynolds's Discourses on Painting.*

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